Kennebec Journal, Augusta, Maine

Khmer Rouge genocide policy acknowledged

By KER MUNTHIT
The Associated Press

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia — A former Khmer Rouge leader expected to face a U.N. tribunal acknowledged Tuesday there is "no more doubt left" that his regime committed genocide, the first admission of the communist group's collective guilt.

Khieu Samphan's surprising statement in an interview with The Associated Press is a major step in the long overdue effort to bring to justice those responsible for the deaths of 1.7 million Cambodians during the ultra-leftist group's 1975-79 rule.

Many of the victims were executed; the rest died of starvation, disease and overwork in the Khmer Rouge's attempt to create an agrarian utopia. Now, with an agreement on a tribunal earlier this month between U.N. and Cambodian officials, ex-Khmer Rouge leaders should soon face charges for the first time.

A former head of state and one of the few top Khmer Rouge leaders still alive, Khieu Samphan, 72, is certain to be indicted. Speaking by telephone from his home, he apparently hoped to begin giving his version of Cambodia's bloody history before his likely prosecution for genocide and crimes against humanity.

He insisted he never ordered any killings — and claimed he only learned from a documentary two months ago about the extent of the Khmer Rouge's crimes.

"Everything has to go the trial's way now, and there's no other way," he said. "I have to prepare myself not to let the time pass away. But I also want the public to understand about me, too. I was not involved in any killings."

Until Tuesday, none of the Khmer Rouge's top leaders had publicly accepted that the government committed genocide.

But Khieu Samphan said he realized he could no longer ignore the Khmer Rouge's atrocities after he saw a documentary about the notorious S-21 prison, presented to him by a Cambodian-French filmmaker, Rithy Pan.

"When I saw the film, it was hard for me to deny (the killings). There's no more doubt left," said Khieu Samphan, who lives in Pailin, 175 miles northwest of the capital, Phnom Penh.

"I was surprised, because I never thought it (the regime) went to that extent in its policies. S-21 was in the middle of Phnom Penh. It was clearly a state institution. It was part of the regime."

Until he saw the film, he said he had reserved his judgment about the prison's existence and atrocities.

As many as 16,000 people are believed to have passed through the gates of the infamous prison but only 14 are thought to have survived. The prison is now the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum.

None of the Khmer Rouge's surviving leadership has faced justice. Many are infirm but — like Khieu Samphan — live and move freely in the country. Pol Pot, the regime's supremo, died in 1998.

After five years of negotiations, U.N. and Cambodian officials tentatively agreed this month on steps to set up the tribunal. But the court's creation has been delayed by a lack of funds and by political instability after Cambodia's inconclusive general elections left three parties jostling to create a coalition.

Record reptile

The Associated Press

A giant reticulated python curls inside a cage at Curugsewu Recreational Park, in Kendal, Central Java, Indonesia, on Tuesday. The 15-meter (49.21 feet) long, 447-kilogram (985 pound) snake was captured in Jambi province in Sumatera island last year but only recently put on public display. If confirmed, it would be the largest snake ever kept in captivity.

U.N. tells U.S. no help needed in Libya effort

By GEORGE JAHN
Associated Press Writer

VIENNA, Austria — The U.N. nuclear agency does not need American help in dismantling Libya's nascent weapons program, the agency chief told The Associated Press on Tuesday, echoing differences with Washington over Iraq and Iran.

The International Atomic Energy Agency is happy to receive U.S. and British intelligence that will assist its inspectors in Libya, said Director General Mohamed ElBaradei.

But the IAEA doesn't want help on the ground.

"I am not familiar with anything they plan to do on a bilateral basis," ElBaradei said in an interview when asked about U.S. plans to police and scrap Libya's covert nuclear program. "As far as I'm concerned, we have the mandate, and we intend to do it alone."

The Bush administration is convinced Libya's nuclear program was far more extensive than assumed by the Vienna-based IAEA. In response, Washington has decided to send its own inspectors and British technical experts to Libya to help survey and dismantle its weapons programs.

ElBaradei spoke to AP a day after returning from a visit to Libya, where he and an IAEA team visited four once-secret nuclear sites in the capital, Tripoli. They said that, from what they saw, Libya was still years away from developing nuclear weapons.

During the trip, ElBaradei met with Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi, who assured the IAEA chief that Libya would cooperate fully with inspections and eliminate its long-secret nuclear program, saying he wanted to turn Libya into a "mainstream" nation, IAEA spokesman Mark Gwozdecky said.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Adam Ereli said Secretary of State Colin Powell spoke with ElBaradei before and after his visit to Libya.

"It's going to take time before we can draw final conclusions about the Libyan program," Ereli said, adding that the Bush administration is planning to work with the IAEA to determine the nature of Libya's weapons activities.

Another official said U.S. weapons experts are expected to consult with Libyan experts about the program either in Libya or a third country in early 2004. No dates have been set.

The White House and ElBaradei's agency have also had tensions during the past year over the extent of the nuclear weapons threat in Iraq under Saddam Hussein and in Iran.

The Americans invaded Iraq arguing that Saddam was trying to make nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. ElBaradei maintains that what his teams saw in the months preceding the war suggested the Iraqis were in no position to build a nuclear weapon.

So far, after eight months of U.S. control over Iraq, no such weapons have been found.

American officials also rankled at ElBaradei's assessment in November that IAEA inspectors had found "no evidence" of an arms program in Iran, though they noted suspicious findings and criticized Tehran for hiding part of its nuclear program for years.

The United States asserts that uranium enrichment and other Iranian activities point to attempts to make nuclear weapons.

Connecticut

Ashcroft steps aside in leak probe

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Attorney General John Ashcroft removed himself Tuesday from the investigation into whether the Bush administration leaked a CIA operative's name to a newspaper columnist, and a career federal prosecutor from Chicago was named as special counsel to take over.

In a move cheered by Democrats, Deputy Attorney General James Comey announced that Ashcroft had stepped aside to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest after reviewing evidence recently developed in the inquiry. He would not specify the nature of that evidence.

Comey said U.S. Attorney Patrick J. Fitzgerald in Chicago, a veteran of terrorism and political corruption cases, would take over as a special prosecutor and would be given "the tools to conduct a completely independent investigation."

"He has the power and authority to make whatever prosecutive judgments he believes are appropriate without having to come back to me or anybody else at the Justice Department for approvals," Comey said.

Comey, however, will retain ultimate authority over Fitzgerald as the acting attorney general for the case. Comey rejected choosing a complete outsider to be the special counsel.

Investigators want to know who leaked the name of Valerie Plame, an undercover CIA officer, to syndicated columnist Robert Novak in July.

Plame is married to former Ambassador Joseph C. Wilson, who has said he believes his wife's identity was disclosed to discredit his assertions that the Bush administration exaggerated Iraq's nuclear capabilities to build a case for war.

Tonight on CPTV

The Big Band Sounds of World War II

8 pm

Followed by

The Brian Setzer Orchestra: Live in Japan

9 pm

CPTV cptv.org

Super-sized serpent!

Indonesian villagers have captured a python that is almost 49 feet long and weighs nearly 990 pounds, a local official said. If confirmed, it would be the largest snake ever kept in captivity. It's living in a primitive zoo in Curugsewu village on the country's main island of Java. An official said the reticulated python measured 48 feet 8 inches and weighed in at 983 pounds. The Guinness Book of World Records lists the longest ever captured snake to be 32 feet. The heaviest — a Burmese Python kept in Gurnee, Ill. — weighs 402 pounds, according to the book. The Indonesian newspaper Republika said the snake, which was caught last year but only recently put on public display, eats three or four dogs a month.

Associated Press

TELEVISION HIGHLIGHTS

TV TONIGHT AT A GLANCE